



MOKELE MBEMBE

THE CONGO DINOSAUR



THE MONSTERQUEST AFFAIR

IN LATE 2008, I was asked to participate in an episode of a cable-television show called *MonsterQuest*. Like many of the newer “reality” shows on formerly scientific cable stations, it was pseudoscientific tabloid journalism: lots of moody music and dark, foreboding camera shots promoting one kind of legendary monster or another, with dubious “eyewitness” testimony and sketchy “evidence”—nothing concrete like an actual body or bones. Normally, I ignore such programs as a waste of time and focus on trying to improve real science documentaries. However, this episode concerned the alleged dinosaur in the Congo: Mokele Mbembe. Thought by cryptozoologists to represent a surviving population of sauropod dinosaurs, Mokele Mbembe has often been identified with *Brontosaurus*—the old name for the gigantic, long-necked, long-tailed *Apatosaurus*. As a vertebrate paleontologist with considerable experience with dinosaur fossils, I was qualified to speak to at least some of the usual claims made about the creature. I knew that I would be the token skeptic on the program, but I decided that at least one skeptic should appear on the show—otherwise, it would be entirely pseudoscientific fluff.

In January 2009, a two-man crew arrived to film my segments. I set up a quiet classroom with controlled lighting, so they had an undisturbed setting in which to film. I selected a number of real dinosaur specimens and casts to use as props or to fill the background of the shots. The crew set up my “talking-head” interviews in front of a cast of a large duckbill dinosaur skull and filmed me moving teaching fossils around on tables and rolling the cast through hallways on a cart. Most of the questions were relatively straightforward, and I gave them the answers that are found in this chapter.¹

The one surprising moment came when I was handed a wrapped package and asked to unwrap it and interpret the contents as the camera rolled. In the package, I found a fist-size shapeless lump of plaster that looked like absolutely nothing. Hoping for a “gotcha” moment, the crew tried it again, showing me photographs of where the plaster cast had been taken and trying to get me to admit that it looked like a dinosaur footprint. They filmed the shot again and again, each time prompting me with more details about where the cast had been made, but it changed nothing. The cast was simply a lump of plaster that had been formed when it was poured into a random hole in the ground. It was clearly *not* a dinosaur track or, indeed, any animal track. All experienced vertebrate paleontologists have seen many photographs and casts

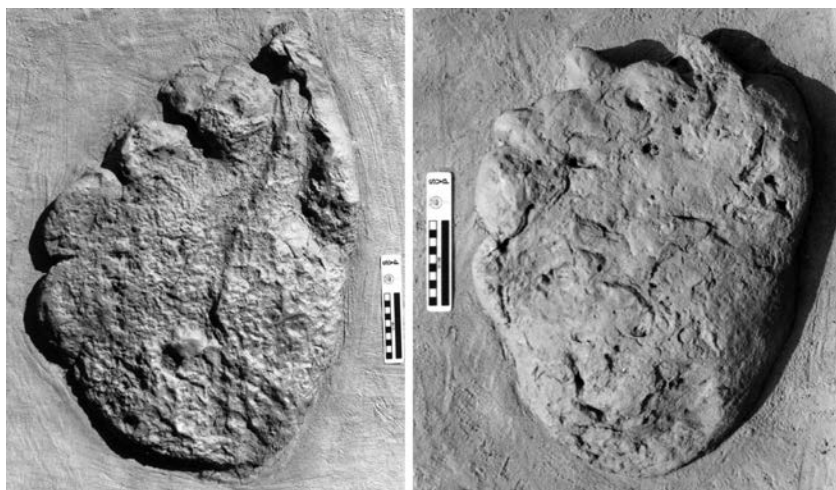


Figure 6.1 Typical sauropod footprints from the Morrison Formation of the western United States, dating to the late Jurassic period (ca. 156–147 million years ago), showing their characteristic shape and evidence of front claw marks: (*left*) from the Tidwell Member; (*right*) from the Salt Wash Member. (Photographs courtesy of John Foster)

of dinosaur footprints (figure 6.1), and most have visited a number of the important track sites, such as the Paluxy River site in Texas. Martin Lockley, a paleontologist who has spent his career documenting trackways, has written several excellent books on dinosaur tracks.² Thus paleontologists know what dinosaur tracks actually look like—the tracks of not only sauropods, like the alleged Mokele Mbembe, but also three-toed theropods and many others. And the lump of plaster bore no resemblance to the track of any animal: no symmetry, no flat footpad impression, no distinct toe impressions. It was a fizzle, and the filmmakers were disappointed.

The episode on Mokele Mbembe first aired in June 2009. It was generally as I had expected from other episodes of *MonsterQuest*: a soundtrack of spooky music and shots of “explorers” trying to find their way up the Congo Basin through the jungles of Cameroon—but no concrete evidence. No footage of the animal, not even old photographs from past films; no carcasses, bones, or other physical remains. The “explorers” tried to interview local people, but immediately biased their efforts by showing them pictures of a sauropod, thus “leading the witnesses.” If they had let the natives do the drawing, they would have been somewhat more believable, although the Western conception of an “African *Brontosaurus*” has been widely disseminated across

Africa for more than a century. The specter of contaminated testimony is raised by anecdotes told by Mokele Mbembe proponent William Gibbons (one of the *MonsterQuest* explorers), who relates that when an expedition he led in 2001 pulled into a random “non-descript, one-horse town” in rural Cameroon, a young man turned to a friend and said, “These must be the people looking for the dinosaur.”³ Even worse was an exchange that took place in 2003, while Gibbons was visiting Langoue, Cameroon (the same site to which he took the *MonsterQuest* crew in 2009). Cryptozoologists find it highly significant when African villagers pick out sauropod pictures from a set of animal flashcards or draw a sauropod-like profile, because (as the *MonsterQuest* narrator pronounced) they have “virtually no contact with the outside world.”⁴ But consider the witness who presented himself to Gibbons, and then “immediately picked out a picture of the *Diplodocus*. ‘Brontosaurus,’ he said, without hesitation. Brian [Sass] and I looked at each other. A brontosaurus? ‘Why did he call it that?’” It turned out that the witness simply recognized the dinosaur from television.⁵ Finally, it is difficult to know when and if the local people make the same distinctions among myth, legend, and reality that Westerners do.⁶

The *MonsterQuest* episode showed a few fuzzy images on underwater sonar, but nothing definitive—especially in waters that support crocodiles, hippos, huge fish, and many other large aquatic animals. The investigators made a big fuss about the holes in the ground from which the “footprint” casts had been made. Finally, they reached the peak of absurdity when they concluded the episode by poking around a large hole in the bank of a river and claiming that a Mokele Mbembe had dug the burrow and was inside. The burrow—if that’s what it was (there are many random holes along riverbanks that are not true burrows)—was definitely not large enough for any creature matching the size of the dinosaur they were hunting. If it was a burrow, it may have been big enough for a snake, a crocodile, or possibly one of the monitor lizards that live in the area. But the investigators claimed that their huge hypothetical dinosaurs squeeze into riverbank caves or burrows, and then seal up the entrances behind themselves, leaving only relatively narrow “air vents.” (These supposed hibernation burrows are vaguely similar in concept to the nesting chambers created by hornbill birds.) Although the sheer size of sauropods renders the burrowing idea silly, the larger problem is that *this whole scenario is made up from whole cloth*.⁷ There is absolutely no reason to guess that small holes in the riverbanks may in fact lead to hibernating dino-

saur—nor do the dinosaur hunters seem to have made any effort to support their hunch with any actual digging. It is utterly baseless speculation, pulled as completely from thin air as if they announced that the holes led to pirate treasure or the remains of Jimmy Hoffa. Such breathtaking leaps showed how little actual training in field zoology they have had.

It turns out that none of the “explorers” seems to have had any relevant training in biology. The “chief scientist” and most experienced Mokele Mbembe hunter in the episode, William Gibbons, is a creationist with degrees in religious education.⁸ His fellow “explorer,” Robert Mullin, is a creationist as well.⁹ Gibbons has published books on cryptids from a creationist perspective and with no peer review, the most recent of which includes the *MonsterQuest* expedition.¹⁰ Neither their lack of appropriate training, including the simplest field biology, nor their creationist bias was mentioned in the film or in the narration. Both Gibbons and Mullin were treated as legitimate scientists. To anyone, such as myself, who has done a *lot* of field research in both biology and geology, their ignorance of basic procedures was painfully obvious by their approach and conclusions. Adding to the play-acting feel of the affair was Mullin’s later declaration that “we were aware that the animal had moved on long ago, we knew when we set out on this particular expedition that it was really more of an opportunity to make a television episode raising awareness of the animal itself than it was a full-fledged expedition.”¹¹

My own part in the film was chopped down considerably, but I was pleased that most of my statements were left intact and not edited to contradict what I had really said (except for the final segment, in which a key phrase had been cut). Oddly, the filmmakers gave me more screen time pushing the cart with the duckbill skull and sorting fossils on the table during the voice-over, compared with the time I actually talked into the camera about the facts of the case. This is consistent with how the rest of the episode was filled with fluff about “explorers” in the Congo, rather than with evidence to support the claims for the existence of Mokele Mbembe.

THE SEARCH FOR MOKELE MBEMBE

Although not as well publicized as those of Bigfoot, Nessie, and the Yeti, the legends of Mokele Mbembe, the alleged dinosaur of the Congo, have a long history. The name is said to come from the Lingala language and is usually translated as “one who stops the flow of rivers.” The creature is most often

reported in the upper reaches of the Congo Basin in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, the Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Cameroon, and the Central African Republic, with the most intense interest focused around Lake Tele and the surrounding regions in the Republic of the Congo.¹² Like those of other cryptids, the lore and eyewitness descriptions of Mokele Mbembe are very discrepant, but a canonical image has emerged in the cryptozoological literature and in popular culture: it is envisioned as a sauropod the size of an elephant (or larger), with a long neck, no hair, and a long tail. Its skin is reddish brown, brown, or gray, depending on the report. It is said to live in the deeper water of the lakes in the Congo Basin and in the deep channels in the cut banks of the rivers. Some descriptions suggest that it has pillar-like legs and leaves tracks with a three-clawed foot impression, although other accounts differ about its trackways.

Early Testimony

Rumors of enormous beasts hidden in the Congo region date back to at least the sixteenth century. In 1776, French missionary Abbé Lievain Bonaventure Proyart's *History of Loango, Kakonga, and Other Kingdoms in Africa* alleged, "The missionaries have observed in passing along a forest, the track of an animal which they have never seen; but it must be monstrous, the prints of its claws are seen on the earth, and formed an impression on it of about three feet in circumference. In observing the posture and disposition of the footsteps, they concluded that it did not run this part of its way, and that it carried its claws at a distance of seven or eight feet one from the other."¹³ Of course, stories about giant footprints are as widespread as human storytellers, and there seems no reason beyond geographic coincidence to infer any connection between the Proyart anecdote (the two sentences quoted from his book are the entirety of the story) and the modern Mokele Mbembe cryptid. While cryptozoologists have sought confirmation of their "living dinosaur" story in both African rock painting¹⁴ and Middle Eastern art and literature of antiquity—citing as evidence even the *sirrush* dragons on the Ishtar Gate in Babylon, which was 2,800 miles away from Lake Tele in present-day Iraq (figure 6.2)¹⁵—the idea of an elusive African dinosaur-like animal seems to have developed only *after* the discovery in the nineteenth century of fossil dinosaurs and other reptiles from the Mesozoic era (250–65 million years ago). This is not to say that there weren't monster yarns in Africa; of course there were. It's

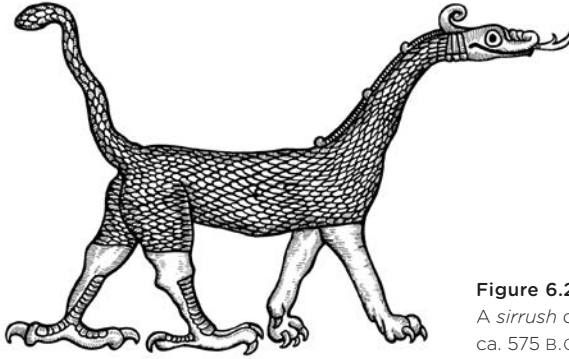


Figure 6.2

A *sirrush* dragon from the Ishtar Gate, ca. 575 B.C.E.

just that Africa's teeming menagerie of folkloric monsters did not in any clear way describe dinosaurs—not, that is, until the twentieth century.

This is a familiar story. As seen in the discussion of sea serpents and the Loch Ness monster, dinosaur discoveries influenced popular fiction—especially pulp and science fiction—and the folklore (and fakelore) of monsters as well. As early as 1833, arguments were advanced that ichthyosaurs and plesiosaurs might survive in the oceans; by 1864, Jules Verne and other authors had made encounters between modern humans and relict prehistoric beasts into a familiar literary trope.¹⁶ The golden age of dinosaur paleontology reached a frenzied peak at the dawn of the twentieth century, igniting the imagination of millions. In particular, the world's first exhibits of mounted sauropod skeletons opened to teeming crowds and buzzing press in 1905. At the American Museum of Natural History in New York, *Brontosaurus* was unveiled at a gala luncheon attended by celebrities, titans of industry, and scientific superstars (including J. P. Morgan and Nikola Tesla) (figure 6.3).¹⁷ When the doors opened to the public, "crowds poured by thousands" into the museum for a peek.¹⁸ Meanwhile in London, the Natural History Museum revealed with similar fanfare its mounted, cast replica of another enormous sauropod, *Diplodocus*—which was a personal gift from Scottish American industrialist Andrew Carnegie to King Edward VII.¹⁹ Other heads of state clamored for *Diplodocus* replicas for their own national museums, and Carnegie was happy to oblige. In 1907, American crowds stood in awe of Carnegie's original *Diplodocus* in its mounting in the newly constructed Carnegie Museums in Pittsburgh. Further replicas of *Diplodocus* were installed in Berlin in 1908²⁰ and Paris in 1910 (figure 6.4),²¹ with still others going to the great museums of Austria, Italy, Russia, Spain, Argentina, and Mexico.²²

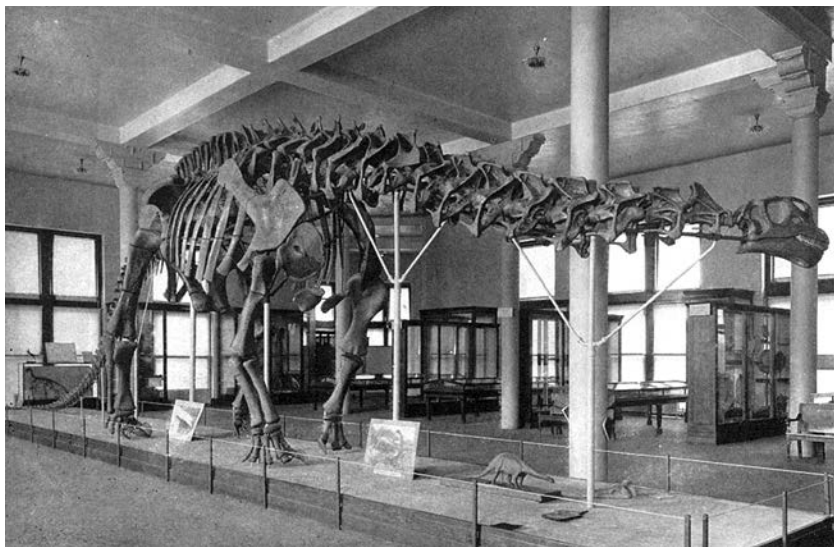


Figure 6.3 The mounted skeleton of *Brontosaurus* (now called *Apatosaurus*) in the American Museum of Natural History, New York. (From W. D. Matthew, *Dinosaurs: With Special Reference to the American Museum Collections* [New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1915], fig. 19)

Anyone who has ever marveled at a dinosaur skeleton—perhaps even one of the original mountings of *Apatosaurus* or *Diplodocus*—will agree that these fossilized animals are an impressive and humbling sight. Yet it may not be possible for us to truly appreciate what it was like for the crowds who flooded into museums in the years 1905 to 1910 to see sauropod dinosaur skeletons *for the very first time*. They had never before seen a toy or a movie or a video-game depiction of these titanic creatures. To behold these reptiles’ impossible-looking necks stretching into the rafters was a shock to the imagination. The wondering question echoed from country to country: *What would it have been like to encounter dinosaurs in the flesh?* Fiction writers leaped to answer that question, with Sherlock Holmes creator Arthur Conan Doyle’s novel *The Lost World* (1912) stranding its bold adventurers on a remote plateau teeming with prehistoric animals. Edgar Rice Burroughs’s books explored several variations on this “lost world” genre, with his heroes confronting dinosaurs and primeval beasts in a hollow Earth (*At the Earth’s Core* [1914] and its sequels), on a mysterious island (*The Land That Time Forgot* [1918] and its sequels), and in a hidden African valley (*Tarzan the Terrible* [1921]).

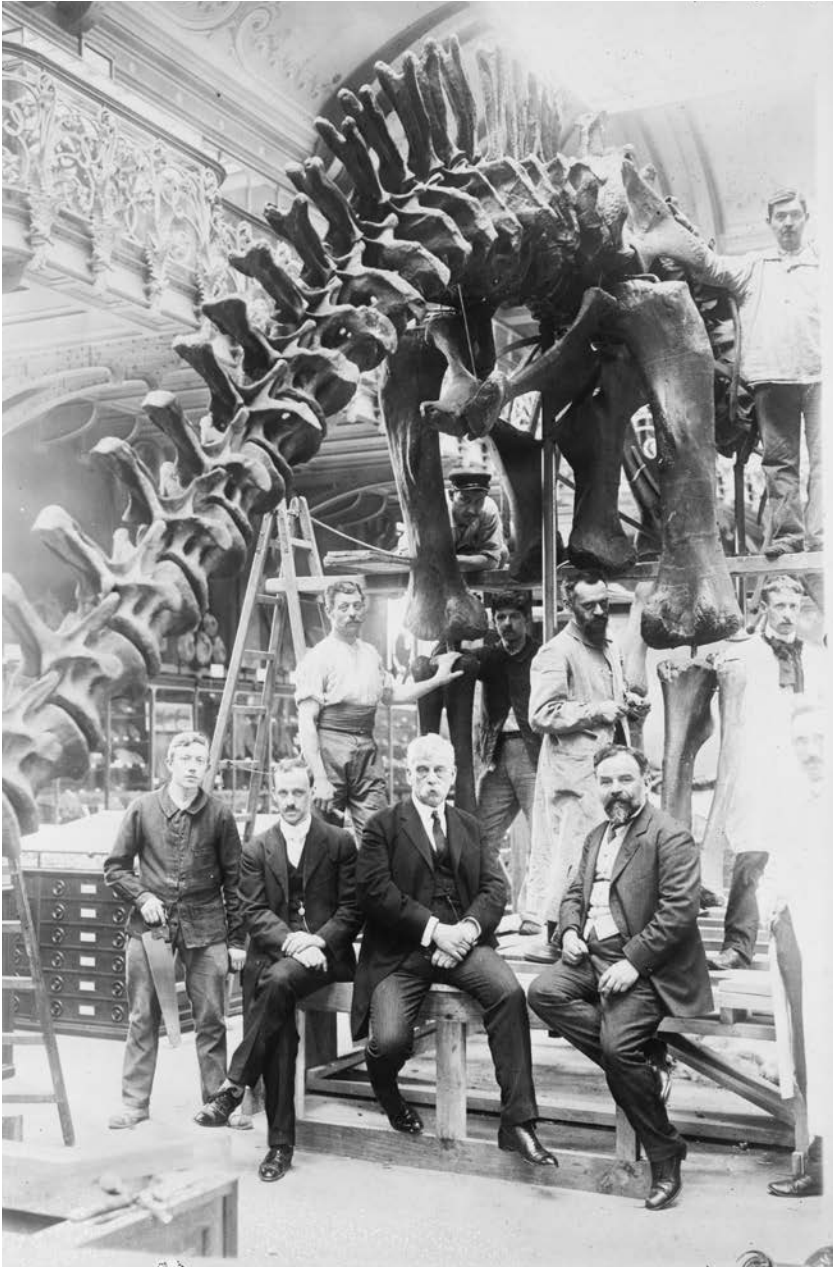


Figure 6.4 Museum workers installing a replica of Andrew Carnegie's *Diplodocus* in the Musée d'histoire naturelle in Paris. (George Grantham Bain Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.)

As much a promotional coup as a marvel of natural history, Carnegie's *Diplodocus* was an international sensation. Admiring accounts appeared in the African press, just as they did elsewhere. In Africa, however, mentions of *Diplodocus* and *Brontosaurus* took on a competitive edge after 1907, when mining engineer Bernhard Sattler and paleontologist Eberhard Fraas discovered the fossilized bones of a massive new sauropod in German East Africa (a colonial territory that encompassed most of present-day Rwanda, Burundi, and Tanzania).²³ It was against this backdrop of sensational sauropod skeleton exhibits in Europe and dramatic sauropod fossil discoveries in Africa that famous exotic-animal dealer, animal and ethnographic entertainment showman, and zoo pioneer Carl Hagenbeck²⁴ stepped forward to present a seductive possibility: What if sauropods like *Brontosaurus* were not truly extinct, but instead *lived on in the remote swamps of Africa*? According to Hagenbeck's book *Beasts and Men* (1909) there was reason to think that was the case:

Some years ago I received reports . . . of the existence of an immense and wholly unknown animal, said to inhabit the interior of Rhodesia. Almost identical stories reached me, firstly, through one of my own travellers, and, secondly, through an English gentleman, who had been shooting big-game in Central Africa. . . . The natives, it seemed, had told both my informants that in the depth of the great swamps there dwelt a huge monster, half elephant, half dragon. . . . [I]t seems to me that it can only be some kind of dinosaur, seemingly akin to the brontosaurus. . . . At great expense, therefore, I sent out an expedition to find the monster, but unfortunately they were compelled to return home without having proved anything, either one way or the other. . . . Notwithstanding this failure, I have not relinquished the hope of being able to present science with indisputable evidence of the existence of the monster. And perhaps if I succeed in this enterprise naturalists all the world over will be roused to hunt vigorously for other unknown animals; for if this prodigious dinosaur, which is supposed to have been extinct for hundreds of thousands of years, be still in existence, what other wonders may not be brought to light?²⁵

This startling suggestion was merely an aside in Hagenbeck's book, but his celebrity as an expert on novel foreign animals (he was the first person to introduce many now-familiar species to Europe—and even to science)²⁶ ensured that his claim made headlines from New York to New Dehli.²⁷ “Brontosaurus Still Lives,” proclaimed the *Washington Post*.²⁸ With those headlines, Hagenbeck's book launched what would become the modern cryptozoological legend of Mokele Mbembe. This press no doubt enhanced the appeal

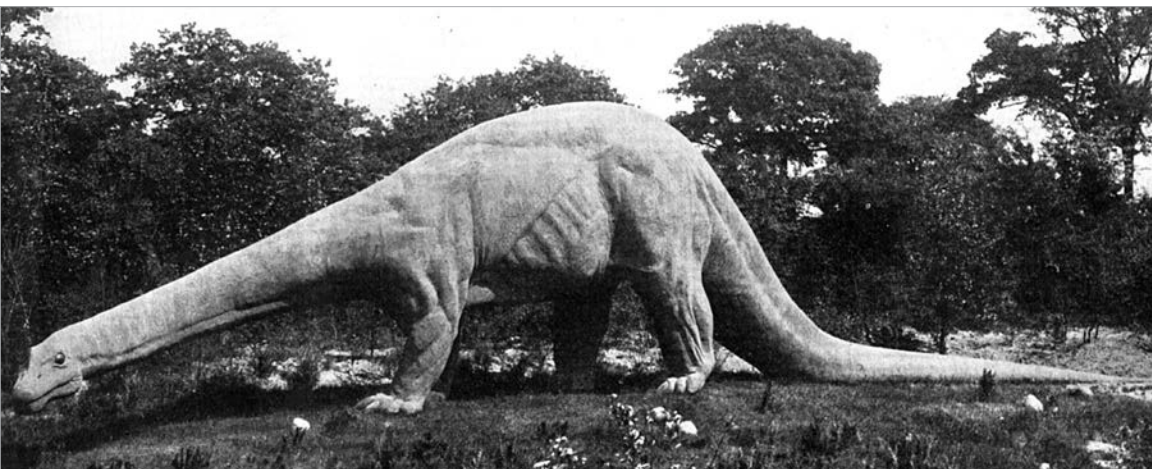


Figure 6.5 The 66-foot cement *Diplodocus* was the largest replica of the life-size prehistoric animals that Carl Hagenbeck installed on the grounds of his zoo. (Photograph from *Travel*, January 1917, courtesy of David Goldman)

not only of the book, but of the cement-dinosaur attraction that Hagenbeck added to his zoo in Hamburg the following year—featuring as its centerpiece a 66-foot *Diplodocus* (“an exact copy of the skeleton of the same animal . . . with the addition of having the flesh on”) (figure 6.5).²⁹

Hagenbeck’s alleged African “dinosaur, seemingly akin to the brontosaurus,” made news around the globe, but it was nothing more than third-hand rumor, presented without details—except for that of location. According to the case that started the cryptozoological legend of Mokele Mbembe, the creature was “said to inhabit the interior of Rhodesia” (a British colonial territory that comprised present-day Zambia and Zimbabwe), an area 1,200 miles from the Lake Tele region of the Congo Basin, where Mokele Mbembe is currently supposed to reside. And while newspaper readers in Europe and America found it perfectly plausible that the primitive giants newly mounted as skeletons in their museums could still lurk in the heart of the “dark continent” alongside the “bloodthirsty savages,” it is important to understand that reactions in the African colonial press were less enthusiastic.³⁰ “There may be no truth whatever in the story, and probably there is not,” opined the *Uganda Herald*.³¹ The resident zoologist at the Rhodesia Museum, E. C. Chubb, had nothing but polite scorn for Hagenbeck’s claim. Having recently spent a month doing field research in the region where Hagenbeck’s dinosaur was said to reside,

reported the African press, Chubb “regretted that he did not meet with the creature on his travels, nor did he hear any rumours of its existence. In fact not only was this the first time that this land edition of the Great Sea Serpent has been sprung upon him, but with due deference to Hagenbeck he begged to doubt the existence of such a monster.” After all, if it were true, “it is curious that nothing has been heard of it before through local native sources”—and, besides, the half-elephant, half-dragon description suggested a biologically impossible chimera, rather than a dinosaur.³² While equally skeptical, another man wrote in response to Chubb that he had heard tales of a monster when in the same region of Rhodesia—and had, he said, talked to “two natives who said they had actually seen it.” The creature he described was not a sauropod, however, but something more like a plesiosaur—or even more like an imaginary chimera. It had “paddles or flippers” that it “used to propel itself with. The general description was the head of a crocodile, with rhino horns, neck like a python, body of a hippo and a crocodile tail, all of tremendous size.”³³ In a private letter to Chubb that he evidently shared with the *Buluwayo Chronicle* (which ran it under the headline “The ‘Brontosaurus’: More Hearsay”), another writer reported rumors of a “three-horned water rhino” that “kills the hippo in Lake Bangweolo” and lives in swamps in that region.³⁴

In 1911, another famous German adventurer, Lieutenant Paul Graetz, collected further tales—and, he said, some physical evidence—about a creature that was known to the locals of the Lake Bangweulu region of Zambia as *nsanga*. Graetz was a celebrity, having become the first person to cross Africa in an automobile (a two-year journey), and in June 1911 he set out to cross the continent again—this time by motorboat. Widely circulated press hype about his aim to reach “parts of central Africa, which are at present practically unexplored” and “in particular Lake Bangweolo” attracted some backlash from people familiar with those regions.³⁵ One correspondent wrote “ridiculing the pretensions [*sic*] of Lieut. Graetz” to explore “the mysterious Lake Bangweolo. The correspondent says he lived there for years, shot over it, fished it, and says hundreds of white men have thoroughly explored this hunters’ paradise.” He added, “The stories of the Clupekwe (the mythical Brontosaurus) are just legends” and explained that regional folklore describes dozens of equally fabulous monsters, including “a wonderful animal in shape like the lion, but of monstrous size, which even frightens the lordly elephant.”³⁶ Despite this warning, Graetz reached Lake Bangweulu at the end of October and found people willing to tell tales of monsters. He wrote, “The crocodile

is found only in very isolated specimens in Lake Bangweulu . . . but in the swamp lives the nsanga, much feared by the natives, a degenerate saurian which one might well confuse with the crocodile, were it not that its skin has no scales and its toes are armed with claws. I did not succeed in shooting a nsanga, but . . . I came by some strips of its skin.”³⁷

How did the notion of a dinosaur in Rhodesia in 1909 morph into the legend of a dinosaur half a continent away in the Congo today? Whatever the description of this Rhodesian monster (or monsters), sauropods were all the rage in Europe and America. The international press latched onto the idea of a living African sauropod and never let go. We can infer that this African dinosaur was a cultural creation, a creature from the imagination projected onto the African landscape because it was projected *everywhere*—eventually including the Congo (figure 6.6). “Rumours about creatures of this kind have been reported in a ring of country 2,000 miles in diameter,” explained Bernard Heuvelmans.³⁸ This is not an exaggeration. In 1910, for example, a character named Charles Brookes came forward to say that “pygmies” from the southern rim of the Sahara Desert had told him that colossal dinosaurs lived around “great lakes existing in the heart of the desert itself”—along with giant humans.³⁹ Notably, he cited direct inspiration from Carnegie’s sauropod skeleton: “[T]he 80-foot diplodocus, now in the Paris Museum of Natural History . . . brings back to my mind many stories I heard from natives and pigmies . . . regarding monsters that are still in existence.”⁴⁰ (Perhaps also notably, he was pursuing government funds to mount an expedition.) Brookes’s claimed dinosaurs, living 1,000 miles or more from Lake Tele, the home territory of Mokele Mbembe, were still close neighbors compared with the *Brontosaurus* reported in 1921 in South Africa. Allegedly spotted lurking in the Orange River by multiple witnesses on multiple occasions, this “strange, gigantic beast . . . swims in the rapids and is so tall that he stands upon his feet and stretches his neck into the trees, where he devours the topmost branches.”⁴¹ These Orange River sightings took place almost as far from Lake Tele as New York is from Los Angeles.

Rather than recording genuine ethnozoological knowledge of a population of animals in the Congo Basin, the Mokele Mbembe lore is a distillation of many creatively varied stories from widely separated regions. Nonetheless, there *are* signs that a recognizable version of the modern Mokele Mbembe tradition existed in the Congo by 1913—even if most of the dinosaur sightings in Africa were occurring elsewhere across the continent. That year, according



Figure 6.6 The canonical Mokele Mbembe's alleged Congo Basin habitat is highlighted in this map of Africa (Lake Tele is near the center), but reports have placed relict African dinosaurs in many other regions of the vast continent, thousands of miles apart. This map indicates just a few of the early reports of *Brontosaurus*-like animals in Africa. (Illustration by Daniel Loxton)

to Willy Ley, a German officer named Ludwig Freiherr von Stein zu Lausnitz led an expedition into the interior of what was then the German colony of Kamerun. He is reported by Ley to have written a detailed manuscript that deals in part with “narratives of the natives” concerning a creature they called *mokéle-mbêmbé*:

The animal is said to be of a brownish-gray color with a smooth skin, its size is approximately that of an elephant; at least that of a hippopotamus. It is said to have a long and very flexible neck and only one tooth but a very long one; *some say it is a horn*. A few spoke about a long, muscular tail like that of an alligator. Canoes coming near it are said to be doomed; the animal is said to attack the vessels at once and to kill the crews but without eating the bodies. The creature is said to live in the caves that have been washed out by the river in the clay of its shores at sharp bends.

It is said to climb the shores even at daytime in search of food; its diet is said to be entirely vegetable. This feature disagrees with a possible explanation as a myth. The preferred plant was shown to me, it is a kind of liana with large white blossoms, with a milky sap and applelike fruits. At the Ssômbô River I was shown a path said to have been made by this animal in order to get at its food. The path was fresh and there were plants of the described type nearby. But since there were too many tracks of elephants, hippos, and other large mammals it was impossible to make out a particular spoor with any amount of certainty.⁴²

This account is obviously extremely important. If correct, it establishes a reasonably early date of development for the Mokele Mbembe legend in form and name, and even (arguably) suggests some now-canonical details. However, important questions of provenance have yet to be resolved. As Heuvelmans notes, this “report was never published, because Germany lost interest in the Cameroons when she lost the colony itself after the 1914–18 war, but it still exists in manuscript.”⁴³ Stein’s important account is known to the cryptozoological literature *only* from the fragment translated by Ley in the 1940s—and the background for it is known only from Ley’s brief discussion. When was the manuscript written, and does it still exist? Is Ley’s translation accurate? What were the circumstances of Stein’s expedition? What other relevant information does the manuscript contain? Reliance on Ley regarding these questions is a major gap in scholarship about Mokele Mbembe. (There is possible partial corroboration for this account—or possible refutation—in a recollection from Chalmers Mitchell, secretary of the Zoological Society of London. Commenting in 1919 on a current yarn about a Congo dinosaur, Mitchell recalled a remark made by former Kaiser Wilhelm: “When visiting the London Zoo he described the existence of a similar pre-historic monster in German East Africa.”⁴⁴ German East Africa was on the opposite side of the continent from Cameroon.)

Whatever the provenance of Stein’s manuscript, it was in any event unknown to the public. So how did the “African *Brontosaurus*” legend—originally focused on Rhodesia—become entrenched as a belief about the Congo? In some ways, either location is equally suitable for a Western media legend about an African dinosaur: both regions feature vast, lush swamps and river systems, making them seem to early-twentieth-century audiences like the perfect habitat for sauropods. As one 1909 response to Hagenbeck’s dinosaur claims conceded, “Those creatures lived under conditions probably

not very dissimilar from those that obtain to-day in the swamps around Lake Bangweolo and Lake Mweru.”⁴⁵ As we now know, sauropods were not swamp dwellers and did not spend their time immersed in lakes or rivers—but in those days, people incorrectly imagined just that. In the public imagination, all sauropods were essentially Mokele Mbembe.

Nonetheless, it was a specific case that brought the Rhodesian dinosaur to “the Congo”—though only just. In 1919, London newspapers rang with astonishing dinosaur news from “the native village of Fungurume” in the Belgian Congo (the southeastern corner of the present-day Democratic Republic of the Congo), a mere 250 miles from Lake Bangweulu in Rhodesia:

The head of the local museum here has received information from a Mr. Lepage, who was in charge of railway construction in the Belgian Congo, of an exciting adventure last month. While Lepage was hunting one day in October he came upon an extraordinary monster, which charged at him. Lepage fired but was forced to flee, with the monster in chase. The animal before long gave up the chase and Lepage was able to examine it through his binoculars. The animal, he says, was about 24 ft. in length, with a long pointed snout adorned with tusks like horns and a short horn above the nostrils. The front feet were like those of a horse and the hind hoofs were cloven. There was a scaly hump on the monster’s shoulders. The animal later charged through the native village of Fungurume, destroying the huts and killing some of the native dwellers.⁴⁶

As the horror of World War I unfolded, Africa’s dinosaurs seem to have vanished—but with the dawn of peace, the world was once again ready for an entertaining monster mystery. Headlines buzzed with the news of Lepage’s sighting, with some newspapers explicitly likening this encounter to those in Conan Doyle’s *The Lost World*.⁴⁷ It was swiftly followed by a report from a second man:

A Belgian prospector and big game hunter, named Mr. Gapelle, who has returned here from the interior of the Congo, states that he followed up a strange spoor for 12 miles and at length sighted a beast certainly of the rhinoceros order with large scales reaching far down its body. The animal, he says, has a very thick kangaroo-like tail, a horn on its snout, and a hump on its back. Mr. Gapelle fired some shots at the beast, which threw up its head and disappeared into a swamp. The American Smithsonian expedition was in search of the mysterious monster referred to above when it met a serious railway accident, in which several persons were killed.⁴⁸

It is important to note that Lepage's and Gapelle's accounts do not describe sauropods and that they were set 1,000 miles from the regions where cryptozoologists now seek Mokele Mbembe. But these were not the only flaws. Fearing that the tales "may grievously harm scientific research," a correspondent knowledgeable in the details of the cases wrote to explain how they had unfolded as a practical joke. "I have absolute authority to say that the whole report is fabulous," he wrote, "and I trust that the same publicity will be given to the correction that was given to the rumour."⁴⁹ The stories swiftly came apart under a crossfire of critiques from people who knew the joker, David Le Page. "It is all a yarn," one wrote to a relative in England. "A missionary arrived at Fungwrame mine . . . on his way south and stayed at the mine to mess, waiting for a train. Dave le Page, whom I know well, pulled the missionary's leg by reciting the yarn. . . . The missionary gave an account to the Press just as it appeared. The story caused a lot of amusement up here."⁵⁰ This exposé was confirmed in detail two years later by a Mrs. Simon, who had been in Fungurume when the lark took off. She explained to the papers that Le Page, "well-known in Southern Rhodesia for his elastic imagination," fooled a Mr. Raymer, who then communicated the bogus yarn to the head of the Port Elizabeth Museum. The museum director, in turn, passed it to the press.⁵¹ Speaking to the remaining detail of the story, Wentworth D. Gray wrote as the representative of the Smithsonian African Expedition to say that the explorers were not, in fact, hunting dinosaurs. Moreover, he pointed out, Gapelle "does not exist except in the imagination of a second practical joker, who ingeniously coined the name" as an anagram of Le Page.⁵² And yet, predictably, the unraveling of Le Page's story did little to dampen its inspirational effect. Copycat sightings soon emerged—one of a monster "with a head like a lion, with fangs resembling a walrus, 18 feet in length, and its body covered with scales and spottings like a leopard"⁵³—and brave souls set off in search of dinosaurs: "Amongst the British big game shooters who are leaving in quest of the alleged Brontosaurus is Capt. Lester Stevens, who is taking with him the dog 'Laddie,' who is half a sheep dog and half a wolf," the press announced, adding, "Capt. Stevens believes that the giant reptile lives in a subterranean lake."⁵⁴

Modern Testimony

The modern cryptozoological legend of the Mokele Mbembe of Lake Tele grew slowly. Through the 1940s and 1950s, early cryptozoological authors

Willy Ley, Ivan Sanderson, and Bernard Heuvelmans picked up and discussed the turn-of-the-century “African *Brontosaurus*” idea.⁵⁵ It was a question, Sanderson wrote, “doubtless born of wishful thinking, that all of us have probably at one time or another asked ourselves—namely, could there be a few dinosaurs still living in the remoter corners of the world?” In the 1960s, independent explorer James H. Powell Jr. took up this very question, inspired by the material collected by Heuvelmans (and by the correspondence he struck up with Heuvelmans, Sanderson, and Ley). “Of these early accounts,” Powell wrote, “none was more tantalizing than that of the Baron [Ludwig Freiherr] von Stein zu Lausnitz from northern Congo.” As with so many popular ideas, the person who first seizes the reins sets the course. By zeroing in on Stein’s report, and resolving to pursue it, Powell did just that. In 1972, he received a grant from the Exploration Fund of the Explorer’s Club to study crocodiles in the region. Unable to get an entry visa for what was then the People’s Republic of the Congo, Powell used the Explorers Club grant to pursue the African dinosaur (or at least to ask questions about it) in neighboring Gabon and Cameroon in 1976 and in Gabon again in 1979.⁵⁶ Meanwhile, he had introduced himself to Roy Mackal, who had been investigating reports of the Loch Ness monster. Together, they ventured to the Republic of the Congo in 1980—and in doing so began the fully modern cryptozoological legend of Mokele Mbembe.

As detailed by Mackal, numerous sighting reports, traditional descriptions, and dubious yarns have accumulated over the years, although they differ greatly in details and are highly inconsistent about many important physical features.⁵⁷ Most accounts come from a variety of local peoples, often in the form of hearsay. It is hard to determine how much Mokele Mbembe testimony is based on actual events and how much is based on legends that have been passed down and distorted through retelling. Worse, it is impossible to know how much of the lore of this cryptid has been invented to meet the expectations of foreign guests. As one of Carl Hagenbeck’s colonial-era animal wilderness scouts explained, it was next to impossible to get reliable information on the alleged Rhodesian dinosaur because “the natives, wishing to please the white visitor and hoping for a valuable gift at the same time, are only too ready to assert that they know of an animal in their territory with blue skin, six legs, one eye, and four tusks. The size is entirely up to the questioner; the native will tell him what he thinks the white man wants to hear.”⁵⁸ Neither this flexibility nor this conflict of interest vanished with the end of

colonialism. For an example of the first, consider that one of Powell's informants in Gabon told him in 1976 that he had never seen the beast, only to dramatically change his story three years later. By 1979, the man was claiming to have, decades earlier, built a hut from which he staked out the monster for many days and many nights and finally watched it emerge from the water. He was now able to obligingly take Powell to the exact spot where he had seen the creature climb from the river, but objected in apparent fear when Powell attempted to take a depth sounding. "I have never seen a man more truly terrified," wrote Powell, seemingly unconcerned that the same man had previously denied seeing the creature at all. "If he were acting, then he ought to be in Hollywood picking up Academy Awards." (Nor did Powell seem troubled that most of the people in the area did not recognize a picture of a *Diplodocus*—or that one villager explicitly told Powell that the regional name *n'yamala* described an imaginary animal.)⁵⁹

Although Mokele Mbembe seeker William Gibbons has insisted that "these people have nothing whatsoever to gain from telling stories because we don't pay them, they get no reward from us for doing this,"⁶⁰ he also has described both financial transactions and monetary disputes between foreign monster hunters and, for example, the residents of the village of Boha near Lake Tele. Gibbons reported that the villagers were angry that the expedition led by Herman and Kia Regusters in 1981 had failed to fulfill "promises of gifts and money" and that one expedition had been left stranded at the lake in 1987 by the local guides after refusing to pay more than the agreed price. Gibbons's own 1985 expedition paid the Boha elders for access to Lake Tele.⁶¹ Similarly, a member of the 1988 Japanese expedition to Lake Tele described meeting with "Boha village elders, who demanded a substantial fee for our expedition to gain access to Lake Tele."⁶² Gibbons even asserts that during negotiations with a Japanese expedition in 1992, the Boha village elders "promptly held the expedition hostage while the sum of \$12,000 (USD) was sent . . . to secure their release" (though we have been unable to confirm this anecdote).⁶³ Clearly, there are plausible financial incentives for local informants to wish to entice further investigators and television crews to visit the region. Moreover, virtually all the eyewitness testimony in the Mokele Mbembe literature has been solicited and translated by a small number of guides—often paid guides who lead multiple cryptozoological tours to the same villages and draw on existing relationships year after year.⁶⁴ Notably, in countries with a guided tour industry, such as Cameroon (and, indeed, in



Figure 6.7 According to one poorly corroborated but frequently repeated anecdote, hunters killed and ate a Mokele Mbembe in the 1950s. As the story goes, those who ate the animal mysteriously sickened or died. (Illustration by Daniel Loxton and Jim W. W. Smith)

any service industry anywhere in the world), it is not uncommon for operators to quietly distribute funds to others in the service chain (and to receive commissions when bringing their tour groups to preferred vendors). Finally, Mokele Mbembe proponents themselves benefit when wealthy patrons and television companies provide tens of thousands of dollars in funding for their expeditions.

For a study of the problems with soliciting local testimony, consider the famous tale that a Mokele Mbembe was killed and eaten at Lake Tele, which is difficult to access, in 1959 (figure 6.7). According to this dramatic and mysterious story, all who ate the meat of the animal sickened or died. This has become such a canonical part of this cryptid's lore that it was featured as part of the action in Hollywood's Mokele Mbembe movie, *Baby: Secret of the Lost Legend* (1985). But where did the tale come from? During a one-month fact-

finding mission to the Congo in 1980, Mackal and Powell heard the story of a Mokele Mbembe killed (but not eaten) at Lake Tele—first as “vague rumors,” then as an anecdote that an unnamed soldier heard from his wife,⁶⁵ and finally as an unsourced account related by a local official who was variously identified as Antoine Meombe or Miobe Antoine.⁶⁶ Mackal and Powell followed these rumors to the district of Epena, where they put the question to President Kolonga (or Kolango) of the Epena District of the Likouala Region. To their surprise, Kolonga “smiled at the words Mokele-mbembe, declaring that the word only meant ‘rainbow.’”⁶⁷ Mackal argued with him—and fed the story to the informant: “We have heard several times over that a Mokele-mbembe was killed some time in the past in Lake Tele. We have heard, too, that this Mokele-mbembe is very dangerous, although its food is strictly vegetable material; the malombo is its favorite food. If your people, or rather the pygmies at Lake Tele, are able to kill a rainbow with spears, and the rainbow eats malombo fruit, we are very interested.”⁶⁸ It was a ready-made template—essentially, “This is the story we want to hear.” (Note as well that this is merely the extent of the leading that Mackal *tells* us they did.) Sure enough, Kolonga announced the next day that he was willing to “provide us with the truth about the Mokele-mbembe.” Powell, seemingly unaware of how suspicious this sounds, explained how this went down:

Gradually, as we gained his confidence, and he came to realize we were serious, and not laughing at the traditions of his people, he became cooperative, and promised to collect for us informants who had lived near Lake Tele, as well as others who could give information on “deep places where the animals are seen.”

When he had done this, and we were all gathered together at his house, Mr. Kolango made a little speech to the assembled informants, explaining that we had come from far away to get information on the mokele-mbembe, that we took the existence of the animal seriously and were not laughing at their traditions, and exhorting them to tell only the truth, neither inventing nor holding back.⁶⁹

Sure enough, two of the informants thus provided and primed by Kolango obligingly recited the tale that the Americans had *already announced that they wanted to hear*. Both the first storyteller (identified as Mateka Pascal) and the second (“a fisherman”) acknowledged that they were repeating hearsay:

He (Mateka) did not personally see the animal, as he was only a small child at the time. According to his account, the mokele-mbembe had been entering Lake Tele from the moliba in which it lived via one of the waterways which enter the lake

on its western side. After the animal had entered the lake, the pygmies blocked off its waterway by constructing a barricade of large stakes across it. When the mokele-mbembe tried to return to its moliba, it was trapped by the barricade and killed with spears. Some of the stakes used to construct the trap were large tree trunks, and are still there. The pygmies cut up the animal and ate it. All who ate of it died. The animal killed was said to be one of two. The other one—possibly a mate—is said to still be there, but has become wary and difficult to approach.⁷⁰

The second, unnamed man merely confirmed the hearsay yarn that *he had just heard*, adding only the flourish of a sole survivor: “Those who ate of the meat died. The one survivor, who did not eat of the meat, had died about ten years ago.” Even Mackal seems to have been uneasy about the possibility of informants influencing or inspiring each other’s stories. “If there was anything negative about this informative meeting,” he reflected, “it is that all or most of the eyewitnesses were in the same room, hearing everything that was being reported.”

What are we to make of the “all who ate of it died” story? It is hearsay at best, and the possibility that the story was concocted to order looms large. Only one independent telling of the “all who ate of it died” yarn was recorded—and that by someone admittedly not yet born when the event allegedly took place. Nor is there any corroborating evidence, despite the tantalizing claim that “because Pascal still goes to fish in the very molibo where the killing occurred, he could affirm that the stakes are there to this day, and, therefore, the story is true.” Because Mackal’s and Powell’s visas were about the expire, they left without visiting Lake Tele. “Roy and I now wanted to go on to Lake Tele and the site of the alleged killing of the mokele-mbembe in 1959,” Powell explained. “There we hoped to find bones or other physical remains, perhaps even to sight and photograph the surviving animal. But this was not to be.”⁷¹ (Mackal returned to the region the following year, but seems not to have verified this one straightforwardly testable part of the hearsay “all who ate of it died” tale.)

That’s pretty thin stuff, but it gets worse. Mackal reported that on several occasions local Africans either denied any knowledge of Mokele Mbembe or *asserted that the creature did not exist*—and that he refused to accept such negative testimony! At the village of MOUNGOUNMA BAI, for example, the locals explained that they had “heard of the Mokele-mbembe from [their] fathers” but “never saw it” themselves. “I was astonished,” Mackal wrote. “Here we

were, only a few kilometers from Lake Tele, where a Mokele-mbembe had been killed, yet these villagers claimed to know nothing about it.” Mackal’s confrontational response to this testimony is jaw-dropping (especially when one considers that Mackal’s party was dispersing beer with their pressure to provide congenial testimony and included Congolese security guards armed with AK-47s):

Through Gene and Marcellin as interpreters I responded, demonstrating our rather extensive knowledge of the episode at Lake Tele, including descriptions of the appearance and habits of the animal, what it ate, where it had been seen and by whom. When confronted with such a barrage of information, they were visibly disturbed, and some, in their confusion, admitted to a great deal more knowledge. . . . It became clear that the people of Mougouma Bai were hiding information and knew a great deal about the Mokele-mbembe but were not going to share it with us. . . . Georges made an impassioned plea for cooperation, first conciliatory and then threatening.⁷²

Given this pressure, it is not surprising that some of the villagers began to offer testimony that complied with the story the Americans had provided. Still, Mackal remained displeased with their lack of enthusiasm for his Mokele Mbembe narrative. The party left some desperately needed medical supplies with a Red Cross medic who was visiting the village, but Mackal stated his opinion “that these people did not deserve our medical largess.”

Local testimony about Mokele Mbembe is badly burdened by hearsay and by obvious leading (and pressuring) of alleged witnesses. Moreover, regional informants have also supplied descriptions of a whole menagerie of additional, distinct monsters, including “a giant turtle, a giant crocodile, a giant-snake-like creature, a water elephant with a great horn but no trunk, an animal with plank-like structures growing out of its back, and of course, the Mokele-mbembe proper.”⁷³

A few Westerners (mostly missionaries) claim to have caught brief glimpses of Mokele Mbembe, but their accounts are also highly inconsistent and difficult to interpret. Every attempt to obtain reliable photographs, films, or footprint casts of this alleged creature has failed. The film shot by zoologist Marcellin Agnagna in 1983 is also useless. Agnagna claimed first that he had failed to remove the lens cap and then that the camera had been set at macro-focus rather than telephoto. (The circumstances are also suspicious. Visiting the same Boha village three years later, Gibbons reported that “we

could not find any of the witnesses from 1983 who could confirm Marcellin's story."⁷⁴ Even more damaging to Agnagna's claim is this exchange between British travel writer Redmond O'Hanlon and the son of a Boha village elder, which took place in 1989: "'So, Doubla,' I said softly, 'why did Marcellin swear he saw the dinosaur?' 'Don't you know?' said Doubla, giving me his first real smile. 'It's to bring idiots like you here. And make a lot of money.'"⁷⁵ The photos taken in 1985 by Rory Nugent cannot be usefully interpreted. As one critic described them, "One is a very distant snapshot of what appears to be a log floating in a lake; the other might as well be a flying, out-of-focus wedding bouquet in transit past a bed sheet."⁷⁶ (Even cryptozoologists are unimpressed with these images. "Rory Nugent's alleged Mokele-mbembe photos could be anything," according to Gibbons.)⁷⁷

More revealing is how many expeditions have traveled through the Congo Basin in search of Mokele Mbembe without obtaining any convincing evidence of the creature (or in some cases, even managing to find locals willing to affirm that it exists). Between 1980 and 2000, "almost twenty expeditions . . . searched unsuccessfully to find *mokele-mbembe*," Gibbons reflected.⁷⁸ Let's briefly consider a sample. In 1981, the husband-and-wife Regusters expedition traveled to Lake Tele in competition with an investigation led by Mackal. (These expeditions were initially one, but split as a result of a dispute between Mackal and Regusters.)⁷⁹ After their return, the couple held a press conference in which they swore to have seen Mokele Mbembe multiple times—and to have taken photographs, not yet developed. "Even if we had the best photographs in the world," said Regusters, "there would still be people who do not believe it."⁸⁰ This turned out not to be a problem, since none of their thousands of photos showed evidence of a dinosaur.⁸¹ In 1985/1986, creationist and cryptozoologist Gibbons spent time around Lake Tele under the guidance of Agnagna, but "did not find any tangible evidence for the existence or otherwise of *mokele-mbembe*."⁸² With the end of that expedition, Gibbons and his team fell out with Agnagna, who was alleged to have deliberately concealed the location of Mokele Mbembe (among other matters of dispute).⁸³ In 1988, a Japanese expedition and film crew searched the Lake Tele region for thirty-five days, but "found no evidence of the existence of Mokele-Mbembe in the area."⁸⁴ O'Hanlon toured the area in 1989 and interviewed many local people, who told him that the creature was a spirit and not a physical being.⁸⁵ In 1992, a Japanese expedition captured aerial footage of something large and blurry in Lake Tele.⁸⁶ Although ultimately useless—the object was too dis-

tant to allow any positive identification—it has been suggested that this Japanese team may have filmed a canoe. As cryptozoologist John Kirk explained, “What some have taken to be the head and neck of the creature could also just as easily be a man standing at the front of the boat while oaring his way across the lake, while behind him sits another man who might be mistaken for a hump.”⁸⁷ Gibbons’s second trip, in 1992 (apparently financed, oddly enough, by Mick Jagger, Ringo Starr, and other rock musicians),⁸⁸ was actually a missionary and sightseeing trip, with the team’s short stay in the region occupied with dispensing medical treatments and spreading the Gospel.⁸⁹ As a highlight, Gibbons describes testifying in a thatch-roofed village church: “I began to speak, telling them my story of salvation and finding Christ in the jungle. . . . After I had finished speaking, Sarah gave an altar call, and three people . . . came forward and accepted Christ. . . . The power of Satan had been broken. It was a glorious day indeed!”⁹⁰ Notwithstanding this spiritual victory, no tangible sign of Mokele Mbembe was located. In 1999, J. Michael Fay led a 2,000-mile, 456-day biological transect through the region on foot and reported nothing relevant to Mokele Mbembe.⁹¹ Gibbons spent most of November 2000 scouting for Mokele Mbembe in Cameroon⁹² and led a well-funded, all-Christian search into Cameroon in 2001, accompanied by a film crew for the BBC and Discovery Channel.⁹³ They heard stories of several monsters, including the claim to have seen a gray-haired Bigfoot-like creature carried out of the jungle, bound to a pole, by a group of European hunters. Although the members of the expedition allegedly spotted a series of UFOs (one of which “took off into space at a 45-degree angle at a speed that no known earthly craft could possibly match”), they found no tangible evidence for Mokele Mbembe.⁹⁴ (Disappointed by the entire affair, the Discovery Channel dumped the documentary “due to insufficient film material”; the Christian businessman who had helped them secure the contracts and funding for their creationist expedition declared them “amateurs” and parted ways.)⁹⁵

Despite this embarrassment, an American insurance broker and creationist named Milt Marcy offered to foot the bill for Gibbons’s next expedition, which visited Langoue, Cameroon, in 2003.⁹⁶ This trip was notable for introducing yet another type of monster: giant spiders. Having heard from an English woman who claimed that her parents once had spotted a spider “at least four or five feet in length,” Gibbons asked the villagers “if they knew of any such giant arachnid, and indeed they did!” In a remarkable coincidence, these monsters—“strong enough to overpower and kill a human being”—lived right

around the village! No one had mentioned the giant spiders to Gibbons on his previous two visits because he had not asked, which was a shame because a giant spider had been living right behind the camp of one of his informants at the time. “At that moment,” wrote Gibbons, “I felt like drowning myself in the river. A golden opportunity to capture a rare and completely unclassified species of giant arachnid had eluded us.”⁹⁷ (Such a B movie–style giant spider probably is not possible, physically: limited by an exoskeleton, it could neither support its own weight nor extract enough oxygen from the air to survive.) The group poked around for a few days and delivered some sermons, with the group’s Cameroonian Pastor Nini “even casting out demonic spirits.”⁹⁸ Then, on their last day on the river, “Pastor Nini boldly proclaimed that this would be the day when we would encounter the la’kila-bembe [allegedly a synonym for Mokele Mbembe]. The Lord had assured him that this was truly the day”—and right on schedule, it was! As they floated over the water, their guide stood up in the canoe, declaring that he could see “a very big animal crossing the river just ahead of us.” The cryptozoologists saw nothing and captured nothing on film, but they were impressed with the guide’s detailed description of a reddish-brown creature with “typically reptilian” eyes.⁹⁹ And then they went home.

In 2004, Marcy funded a return expedition to Langoue, headed this time by creationists Peter Beach and Brian Sass.¹⁰⁰ They used plaster to take casts of some marks that they intuited, based on nothing in particular, to be claw prints from a dinosaur. I examined these casts during the *MonsterQuest* production and determined that they were not sauropod tracks. But Beach and Sass also conceived a notion that now constitutes the cutting edge in Mokele Mbembe belief: the legendary dinosaurs seal themselves up in riverbanks for long periods. Supposedly, the animals first climb into caves or burrows and then wall up the caves from the inside, with small air vents near the top. As no part of this behavior has ever been observed—even allegedly—this wild speculation can only be described as baseless and bizarre. While examining the small riverbank holes that they supposed to be air vents, they heard “a distinctive scraping sound, as though something was attempting to claw its way out of the sealed chamber.” Could it be that Mokele Mbembe was only *feet away from them*—and about to emerge? We will never know because Beach and Sass got spooked, and left immediately.¹⁰¹ In 2006, Marcy himself ventured to the same region with Robert Mullin and Beach. They located what they imagined to be several sealed caves containing Mokele Mbembes—which is to say, some small burrows or holes in the riverbank—

and that's it. Mullin described it "a dry run as far as Mokele-mbembe was concerned."¹⁰²

In 2008, an episode of *Destination Truth* filmed possible Mokele Mbembe footage on location at Lake Bangweulu in Zambia, the original Rhodesian home of the "African *Brontosaurus*," but this long-distance sequence proved to be of two partially submerged hippos. "I think the people in this lake, they know this myth, they see something like this, which certainly we couldn't identify, and that's I think how this legend gets more and more heat on it until people are really just, you know, believing it," said the host, who concluded, "I think we can lay the mokele to rest."¹⁰³

This brings us back to the *MonsterQuest* expedition of 2009, with all its flaws. Perhaps the silliest sequence features the small riverbank holes taken to be air vents for concealed, hibernating Mokele Mbembes. On camera, Gibbons pokes ineffectually at a bank with a small shovel, declaring, "Once they're sealed in there, it's very difficult to get them out. It's just a pity we didn't have any other way of finding out what's on the other side of this mud wall." Not so much "a pity" as absurd: this was the *third* expedition to travel all the way to Africa to examine the riverside burrows, only to (according to the leaders' confident assertions) stand idly chatting *within a few feet of hibernating Mokele Mbembes*—and not once did they bother to come prepared to dig out the dinosaurs they were there to find? Or even to send a camera inside the alleged air vent? The investigation of the "cave" for *MonsterQuest* literally consisted of poking a stick into the hole.¹⁰⁴ Then, Gibbons explained, "By 3:00 P.M., we all had quite enough of the baking heat and headed back to Langoue for an early dinner."¹⁰⁵ The weakness of this investigation is so obvious that Mullin has acknowledged, "Some have wondered why better equipment hasn't been taken on some of these trips." His explanation is that "we go with what we can afford; not every expeditioneer is rich, and often we do what we can at great cost to ourselves and our personal lives."¹⁰⁶ Perhaps, but many expeditions do little more than arrive and turn around, each burning several thousand dollars in the process. The Gibbons-headed BBC expedition alone enjoyed a budget of at least \$65,000. In 2006, Marcy shipped an entire inflatable zodiac boat and outboard motor to Africa for his trip.¹⁰⁷

As more and more expeditions have been mounted in the past thirty years, with access to increasingly sophisticated technology, much *less* evidence has been recovered. It is also striking that the descriptions of Mokele Mbembe are so inconsistent that one group of Westerners, having heard about its long neck, thought that it was a sauropod dinosaur, while another, having heard

about its horns, assumed that it was a ceratopsian dinosaur. Finally, many of the leads have turned out to be hippos or crocodiles in the water. (Rhinoceroses sometimes have been suggested as culprits. Since they usually live in savannas, scrublands, and grasslands, not in the Congolese jungle, out-of-place rhinoceroses presumably would appear to be as exotic as dinosaurs.)

REALITY CHECKS

Sauropod Biology

What is even more revealing about the descriptions of Mokele Mbembe is that they are based on the antiquated image of sauropod dinosaurs as lumbering beasts that lived in swamps, ate aquatic plants, and dragged their tails in the muck (figure 6.8). This was still the standard depiction of sauropods when early-twentieth-century explorers in the Congo Basin interpreted eyewitness accounts—and even as late as the 1970s, when proponents such as Roy Mackal formed their impressions. But more recent scientific research has shown that sauropods were nothing like this century-old image. Numerous trackways of actual sauropods that date from the Jurassic period (208–144 million years ago) show that they were not slow-moving, tail-dragging dinosaurs. On the contrary, they walked fairly quickly and efficiently on dry land, had a relatively upright straight-legged posture, and held their tails out behind them (figure 6.9), as portrayed in movies like *Jurassic Park* (1993). The reinterpretation of the famous sauropod bone beds in the Morrison Formation in the western United States and Canada, which dates to the Late Jurassic (150–144 million years ago), has demonstrated that most sauropod fossils do not come from swampy deposits, for the dinosaurs lived in seasonally dry woodlands with very little standing water.¹⁰⁸ Evidence from their teeth shows that sauropods did not subsist on aquatic plants, as Mokele Mbembe is alleged to do, but fed on tough conifers and cycads, as well as on ferns.¹⁰⁹ Thus a century-old image of sauropods still influences the ideas of the cryptozoologists who believe in the existence of Mokele Mbembe and try to fit the inconsistent accounts of local peoples into an outdated concept.

Surviving Dinosaurs?

The biggest obstacle to proving the existence of Mokele Mbembe, however, is not the absence of hard evidence. It is that cryptozoologists seldom or never address the basic principles of biology and paleontology:



Figure 6.8 The Mokele Mbembe of legend resembles Charles R. Knight's painting of *Brontosaurus* (now called *Apatosaurus*), shown dragging its tail and supporting its bulk in the water. Knight's reconstruction was cutting edge in 1897, but the modern understanding of sauropods is very different.



Figure 6.9 Modern reconstructions of sauropods feature upright legs for life on land, a horizontal tail posture—and, in some species, an adornment of iguana-like dermal spines. (Illustration by Daniel Loxton, with Julie Roberts)

- *Population constraints:* As has been pointed out in relation to Bigfoot and Nessie, Mokele Mbembe cannot be a singleton or a handful of individuals. For dinosaurs to have survived in the Congo for the past 65 million years, there would have to be a sizable population of them. If there were, there would not be just a handful of inconsistent accounts and no direct evidence, but hundreds of carcasses and thousands of skeletal parts found throughout the Congo Basin over the 150 years of Western exploration. Although the swampy regions of the Congo are not ideal habitats in which to preserve skeletons, skeletal remains of elephants, hippos, and many other animals are found all the time. For a population of animals as large as Mokele Mbembe is believed to be, some hard evidence of its existence would surely have been discovered by now.
- *Aerial surveillance:* A large population of air-breathing sauropods would not be able to hide underwater indefinitely, especially since they preferred dry, open habitats and fed on conifers. They would have been seen by members of the many zoological expeditions that cross the Congo Basin every year, especially by the aerial surveys that are frequently undertaken to count large animal populations. For example, if you type the coordinates 10.903497,19.93229 into Google Earth and zoom in, you can see clear images of an entire elephant herd, with the details of their trunks, ears, tusks, and tails. Indeed, with spy satellites able to spot an object that is less than 3 feet across, and Google Earth able to resolve the details of your own backyard, a population of sauropod dinosaurs should have been caught by such surveillance.
- *The fossil record:* Although the jungles of the Congo Basin are not the ideal habitat in which to preserve or find fossils, there is an excellent fossil record of the past 200 million years from many parts of Africa. In South Africa, fossil beds from the Permian (286–250 million years ago) and Triassic (250–208 million years ago) periods have yielded excellent specimens of synapsids (formerly but incorrectly called “mammal-like reptiles”) and some of the earliest dinosaurs. In the Tendaguru beds in Tanzania, which date to the late Jurassic, have been found some of the best-known sauropods, including the huge *Brachiosaurus* in the Museum für Naturkunde in Berlin, which is the largest nearly complete sauropod skeleton known. There are also fossils of sauropods (mostly titanosaurs) from the Cretaceous



Figure 6.10 Paleontologist Enas Ahmed poses with a fossil humerus from the North African titanosaurian sauropod *Paralititan*, dating from the Cretaceous period, at the Egyptian Geological Museum, Cairo. (Photograph courtesy of Jason Loxton)

period (98–65 million years ago) in a variety of regions in Africa (figure 6.10), including the remarkable discoveries of diplodocoid sauropods by Paul Sereno in the western Sahara.¹¹⁰ And then, in Africa just as in every other locality around the world, the nonavian dinosaurs vanished 65 million years ago, and not one bone has been found to show that they survived the mass extinction at the end of the Cretaceous. The African fossil record of the past 65 million years, the so-called Age of Mammals, is excellent, with many localities that have preserved large-bodied animals like mastodonts and rhino-like *arsinoitheres*—but not one sliver of a dinosaur.¹¹¹

THE HIDDEN AGENDA: CREATIONISM

Most of the active explorers seeking Mokele Mbembe have a nonscientific agenda: Young Earth creationism (the evangelical Christian belief that Earth was created about 6,000 years ago by God, as described in the book of Genesis). For example, Roy Mackal's expeditions were shaped by their interpreter and guide, Pastor Eugene Thomas, an American missionary whom Mackal matter-of-factly described as "with us not only to interpret, but also to spread Christianity."¹¹² Thomas went on to personally convert and baptize William Gibbons in the Congo in 1986,¹¹³ following a harrowing supernatural attack that Gibbons experienced while staying at Thomas's Impfondo mission station. Gibbons described this experience in terms that exactly match the classic symptoms of sleep paralysis (a presence in the room, physical paralysis, terror, a feeling of pressure on the upper body), a well-understood and common sleep disruption that many victims interpret in paranormal or supernatural terms:

While I was slowly drifting toward sleep, something caused me to suddenly snap awake. There was something else in the room with me. . . . Within a minute, perhaps less, a dark and thoroughly evil entity began to fill the room. I tried to call out . . . but my voice died in my throat. I tried to sit up . . . but I was completely paralysed. Steadily the evil presence approached my bed. I was fully awake, yet completely immobile, soaked with sweat and beginning to go out of my mind with terror. . . . [T]he most unbearable pressure suddenly began to squeeze down on my chest, shoulders and arms.

In the days before this experience, Gibbons had become uneasy about his past "dabbling in the occult" (he mentions spiritualism and tarot cards) and

had confided this behavior to Thomas. When experiencing his episode of paralysis in bed, Gibbons writes, “the words of Gene Thomas sprang into my mind. ‘Only Christ can set you free.’ With every last vestige of conscious will, I cried out in my mind to the saviour that the Christians worshipped. ‘Jesus, help me!’ . . . The suffocating, evil presence in the room recoiled, and then vanished.” Perhaps unsurprisingly, this experience triggered a dramatic and sudden religious conversion.¹¹⁴

Gibbons went on to become the leading proponent of the Mokele Mbembe legend—a project he took on with overt missionary zeal. All the expeditions to the Congo led by Gibbons were undertaken with the objective of proving the truth of Young Earth creationism, and most of those who promote Mokele Mbembe are also creationist in their approach.¹¹⁵

In a book on cryptozoology, Gibbons and his coauthor (and flamboyant creationism activist) Kent Hovind shared their “hope and prayer” that their cryptozoological work would inspire “a new generation of Godly, Christian explorers, who will endeavor to venture forth to find and present these amazing mysteries of creation to an unbelieving world.”¹¹⁶ But why would creationists look to legendary monsters to support their biblical literalism?

Mokele Mbembe, in particular, is an idea that Young Earth creationists like Gibbons find natural and attractive: “To the Bible believing Christian, the idea of dinosaurs living with man in the past or even some still living today, is scientifically possible. Christians know that God made all the animals, including dinosaurs, about 6000 years ago.”¹¹⁷ But the creationists’ fascination with Mokele Mbembe is not merely that its existence seems plausible within a creationist worldview, but that its existence has important ideological or theological ramifications. For some reason, creationists believe that the discovery of a dinosaur in Africa will overthrow the entire theory of evolution. This belief is poorly founded. The reality of evolution is based on a gigantic amount of evidence from the fossil record,¹¹⁸ and a single find of a relict species does not overturn this mountain of data.

Creationists point to the discovery of the coelacanth in 1938 as upsetting the evolutionary story, but all it really did was extend the range of a species known rarely from fossil beds of the Early Cenozoic era (65 million years ago–present) into the Late Cenozoic. Gibbons shows their typical thinking:

The Coelacanth was discovered alive and well in 1938 after having been dismissed as extinct for as long as 200 million years. The embarrassing thing about that for

evolutionists was that it was thought to be a foundational species for the transformation of fish into amphibians and[,] as such, should be extinct, since foundation species are not supposed to continue surviving past their progeny. The Coelacanth paid no attention to those scientists and just kept right on “keeping on” to the present day.¹¹⁹

The many errors in this statement show the creationists’ ignorance of the fossil record. Coelacanths were not thought to have been extinct for 200 million years, since there are fossils as young as 20 to 5 million years in age.¹²⁰ Contrary to the creationists’ notions of evolution, coelacanths were not “foundational species for the transformation of fish into amphibians,” but are an order of primitive lobe-finned fishes that appeared in the Late Devonian period (400 million years ago) alongside the earliest relatives of amphibians, as well as the earliest lungfish (also lobe-finned). Coelacanths were *never* thought to be ancestral to amphibians by any evolutionary biologist or paleontologist. Even more revealing is that Gibbons is following the outdated “ladder of creation” notion of evolution, according to which ancestors must die off to give rise to their descendants. This idea is completely erroneous and is akin to saying that your grandfather must have died when your father was born, and your father died when you were born.¹²¹ Evolution is bushy and branching, and ancestral groups often survive and live alongside their descendant groups.

If it were not clear enough from their general arguments, the creationists’ motives are clearly spelled out by Gibbons:

In case there is any doubt about our motivation for this work I should tell you that we feel that the discovery of any of these creatures will be an earthshaking event. It is our belief that eliminating common objections regarding why the Bible can’t be trusted, and demonstrating the historical and scientific accuracy of Scripture[,] will naturally lead people to the next logical step in thinking: If the Bible is true in other respects, what does that tell us about its spiritual ramifications?

When the evolution hypothesis was proposed 150 years ago, it was with the expressed intent of destroying the church and Christianity along with it. If a wrench of this kind could be thrown into the machinery of evolution it would go a long way toward turning people back to the only real truth, the Word of God.¹²²

There are many distortions in this statement, but the one that really stands out is the claim that evolution was proposed expressly to destroy Christiani-

ty. Evolution was proposed only to explain the observed pattern of life. Many evolutionary biologists are devoutly religious and have no conflict with the theory of evolution.¹²³ Evolution undermines the religious beliefs of only fundamentalists, who insist that Genesis must be true in every detail, despite a large amount of evidence to the contrary.¹²⁴

Thus the quest for Mokele Mbembe is not just an idle search for a cryptid, but part of the effort by creationists to overthrow the theory of evolution and undermine the teaching of science by any means possible. As such, it cannot be dismissed or treated lightly, but must be subjected to the full scrutiny of the scientific community.

- 1 “The Last Dinosaur” [season 3, episode 52], *MonsterQuest*, History Channel, June 24, 2009, “MonsterQuest: The Last Dinosaur, Pt. 1,” YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7CeHwgMtvXQ> (accessed November 2, 2011).
- 2 Martin G. Lockley, *A Guide to Dinosaur Tracksites of the Colorado Plateau and the American Southwest* (Denver: University of Colorado, Department of Geology, 1986), and *Tracking Dinosaurs: A New Look at an Ancient World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Martin G. Lockley and David G. Gillette, *Dinosaur Tracks and Traces* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Martin G. Lockley and Adrian P. Hunt, *Dinosaur Tracks and Other Fossil Footprints of the Western United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995); Martin G. Lockley, Barbara J. Fillmore, and Lori Marquardt, *Dinosaur Lake: The Story of the Purgatoire Valley Dinosaur Tracksite Area* (Denver: Colorado Geological Survey, 1997); Martin G. Lockley and Christian Meyer, *Dinosaur Tracks and Other Fossil Footprints of Europe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).
- 3 William J. Gibbons, *Mokele-Mbembe: Mystery Beast of the Congo Basin* (Landisville, Pa.: Coachwhip, 2010), 133.
- 4 “Last Dinosaur, Pt. 1.”
- 5 Gibbons, *Mokele-Mbembe*, 162.
- 6 For example, Rory Nugent describes this conversation with the Boha village witch doctor (near Lake Tele, in the heart of alleged Mokele Mbembe habitat): “My talk of a living dinosaur doesn’t interest him. He believes Mokele-Mbembe is a powerful deity that constantly changes appearance, varying by divine whim and human perception. People have come to him with wildly differing descriptions of Mokele-Mbembe, and he believes them all, sure that no one would risk their own well-being by lying about the gods.” Nugent further quotes the man as saying, “Sometimes people say Mokele-Mbembe is small, like a goat, and sometimes they say he is bigger than the tallest tree” (*Drums Along the Congo: On the Trail of Mokele-Mbembe, the Last Living Dinosaur* [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993], 163–164).
- 7 This idea seems to have originated from James Powell’s visit in 1976 to Cameroon, where local informants told him that *hippos* (not dinosaurs) used riverside caves “for dens and hibernated in them (but did not wall themselves up) during the great rains (not the dry season, as in current Mokele Mbembe mythology).” Hearing this, Powell arbitrarily decreed, “While nsok-nyen normally refers to the hippopotamus, it would probably also be applied to any large aquatic animal reminiscent of an elephant”—an inexcusable bit of cultural license, given that his “informants’ response to the picture of a long-necked dinosaur was that they were unfamiliar with the animal, had never seen anything like it, and were quite sure it did not occur in the area” (“On the Trail of the Mokele-Mbembe: A Zoological Mystery,” *Explorer’s Journal*, June 1981, 86–87).

- 8 His Web site discusses how his planned “discoveries” of cryptids will undermine evolution. See William J. Gibbons, “Welcome to Creation Generation.Com . . . We Are Still Under Construction,” *Creation Generation: Genesis 1:1*, <http://www.creationgeneration.com> (accessed November 2, 2011).
- 9 Robert Mullin’s author biography at Crimson Moon Press (the home of his Christian allegorical science-fiction novel) describes him as a “seven-year editor with Creation Research Society” (Crimson Moon Press: Where Apologetic and Fiction Meet, <http://crimsonmoonpress.com/Authors.html> [accessed May 5, 2012]).
- 10 Gibbons, *Mokele-Mbembe*.
- 11 “Inside Story: Mullin on Mokele-Mbembe,” June 28, 2009, CryptoMundo, <http://www.cryptomundo.com/cryptozoo-news/mullin-mm/> (accessed May 5, 2012).
- 12 Gibbons, *Mokele-Mbembe*, 205.
- 13 Abbé Lievain Bonaventure Proyard, *History of Loango, Kakongo, and Other Kingdoms in Africa* (1776), in *A General Collection of the Best and Most Interesting Voyages and Travels in All Parts of the World*, trans. and ed. John Pinkerton (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1814), 16:557.
- 14 For example, Roy Mackal cited “a strange animal” painted on a rock in Kirumi Isumbirira, Iramba, Tanzania, that previous scholars had identified as mythical or fabulous. Mackal offered this as “cave rock art that could represent an unknown, long-necked, long-tailed, four-legged animal. This evidence should not be taken as more than suggestive because positive identification or conclusions certainly cannot be drawn. But the evidence cannot be dismissed” (*A Living Dinosaur? In Search of Mokele-Mbembe* [Leiden: Brill, 1987], 9–10). Perhaps—but this Tanzanian rock art also cannot be linked in any way to the Mokele Mbembe of Lake Tele (1,200 miles away), except by wishful thinking. African rock-art specialist Fidelis Taliwawa Masao warns that the meaning and interpretation of Central Tanzanian rock painting—including that cited by Mackal, which Masao labeled “Semi naturalistic paintings of animals”—is extremely conjectural. While Mackal claimed that the figure “definitely is not a giraffe,” he had neither the training nor the grounds to assert this. Certainly, it *looks* more like a giraffe than a sauro-pod, and as Masao pointed out, “the giraffe is the most common single [animal] species represented” in rock art in this region (“Possible Meaning of the Rock Art of Central Tanzania,” *Paideuma* 36, Afrika-Studien II [1990]: 189–199).
- 15 See, for example, Willy Ley, *Willy Ley’s Exotic Zoology* (1959; New York: Bonanza Books, 1987), 66–74.
- 16 Surviving ichthyosaurs were advanced as an explanation for sightings of sea serpents in Robert Bakewell, *Introduction to Geology* (New Haven, Conn.: Howe, 1833), 213. This scenario was brought to life in Jules Verne, *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, trans. Willis T. Bradley (1864; New York: Ace Books, 1956), 187–188. For discussion of the influence of nineteenth-century fossil plesiosaur discoveries on cryptozoology, see chapters 4 and 5.
- 17 “Big Thunder Saurian Viewed and Approved,” *New York Times*, February 17, 1905, 9.
- 18 “Old and Young Call to See the Dinosaur,” *New York Times*, February 20, 1905, 12.
- 19 R. W. W., “Mr. Carnegie’s Imitation Dinosaur ‘Makes a Hit’ in England,” *New York Times*, June 4, 1905, X7.

- 20 "Diplodocus Dinner in Berlin," *New York Times*, May 14, 1908, 4.
- 21 "Hunting the Dinosaur," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 17, 1910, G7.
- 22 R. Jay Gangewere, "Dippy's Anniversary," *Carnegie Magazine*, http://www.carnegie museums.org/cmaga/bk_issue/1999/julaug/feat1.html (accessed April 25, 2012).
- 23 "The Dinosaurs of East Africa," *Bulletin of the American Geographical Society* 45, no. 3 (1913): 193–196. The taxonomic history of Eberhard Frass's sauropod fossils is quite complicated, but note that the name he selected, *Gigantosaurus*, is no longer recognized.
- 24 Carl Hagenbeck was the premier supplier of exotic game animals for zoological gardens, traveling menageries, and circuses. During his career, he imported more than 1,000 lions, over 1,000 bears, 300 elephants, 150 giraffes—and countless other animals besides. Hagenbeck developed lower-stress animal-training techniques and in 1876 patented a bar-less approach to constructing zoo enclosures. This became the design theme for the enormously popular private zoo that Hagenbeck opened on May 7, 1907—and the same principles influenced the construction of zoos throughout the world. See Herman Reichenbach, "Carl Hagenbeck's Tierpark and Modern Zoological Gardens," *Journal of the Society for the Bibliography of Natural History* 9, no. 4 (1980): 574, 577–582.
- 25 Carl Hagenbeck, *Beasts and Men: Being Carl Hagenbeck's Experiences for Half a Century Among Wild Animals*, trans. Hugh S. R. Elliot and A. G. Thacker (New York: Longmans, Green, 1912), 95–97.
- 26 Hagenbeck was also the first to import the African black rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis*), the Sumatran rhinoceros (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*), the southern elephant seal (*Mirounga leonine*), and the leopard seal (*Hydrurga leptonyx*), among others. See Reichenbach, "Carl Hagenbeck's Tierpark and Modern Zoological Gardens," 580–581.
- 27 "A Memorable Book on the Traits of Wild Beasts," *New York Tribune*, January 29, 1910, 8; "'Sea Serpent' of the Forest," *Times of India* (Mumbai [Bombay]), January 6, 1910, 8.
- 28 "Brontosaurus Still Lives," *Washington Post*, January 23, 2010, M1.
- 29 "Prehistoric Cement Zoo," *Washington Post*, December 26, 1910, 6.
- 30 Both terms actually appeared in the early Western press coverage of the alleged African *Brontosaurus*. For example, Hagenbeck himself asserted that the region where the dinosaur dwelled was "infested with bloodthirsty savages," while one headline asked, "Are Scions of the Prehistoric Monsters That Once Roamed the Earth Still to Be Found Within Little-Known Parts of the Dark Continent?" ("Searching for Saurians in African Jungle," *Washington Post*, February 19, 1928, SM9). Of course, it is unfair to judge people of the past by modern standards. Hagenbeck was speaking of literally violent encounters, and even today the suspicious-sounding phrase "dark continent" is sometimes used without any intention to refer to race. For a recent discussion of the controversial term, see Ombudsman, "Should NPR Have Apologized for 'Dark Continent'?" February 27, 2008, NPR Ombudsman, http://www.npr.org/blogs/ombudsman/2008/02/should_npr_have_apologized_for.html (accessed April 27, 2012).
- 31 "British East Africa," *Uganda Herald* (Kampala), February 14, 1913, 12.
- 32 "Startling Rumour," *Bulawayo [Bulawayo, Zimbabwe] Chronicle*, December 3, 1909, 3.
- 33 "A Fearsome Beast," *Rhodesia [Zimbabwe] Herald* (Harare), December 17, 1909, 9.
- 34 "The 'Brontosaurus': More Hearsay," *Bulawayo Chronicle*, January 14, 1910, 7.
- 35 "Across Africa by Motor Boat," *Nyasaland Times* (Blantyre, Malawi), May 11, 1911, 5.

- 36 Untitled article, *East African Standard* (Nairobi, Kenya), July 15, 1911, 13.
- 37 Quoted in Bernard Heuvelmans. *On the Track of Unknown Animals*, trans. Richard Garnett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1959), 450.
- 38 Ibid., 441.
- 39 "Hunting the Dinosaur," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 17, 1910, G7. (The spelling of his surname varies by source, spelled either "Brookes" or "Brooks.")
- 40 Quoted in "Sure the Diplodocus Is Not Yet Extinct," *New York Times*, October 2, 1910.
- 41 May Bosman, "Does Prehistoric Monster Still Live?" *Atlanta Constitution*, May 22, 1921, G8. This seems to have been a projection of the then-current African *Brontosaurus* idea on preexisting South African regional lore about the Groot Slang, a giant snake that was itself an expression of an effectively global folkloric "big snake" monster template projected since classical antiquity on regions from Libya to India.
- 42 Quoted and discussed in Ley, *Willy Ley's Exotic Zoology*, 71–72.
- 43 Heuvelmans, *On the Track of Unknown Animals*, 461.
- 44 Quoted in "The Congo Monster. Story Ridiculed," *Beira [Mozambique] News*, December 16, 1919.
- 45 "Startling Rumour."
- 46 "A Tale from Africa: *Semper Aliquid Novi*," *Times* (London), November 17, 1919, 11.
- 47 "Much Interest Aroused," *Rhodesia Herald*, November 25, 1919, 5.
- 48 "Dragon of the Prime," *Times*, December 12, 1919, 13.
- 49 "No Brontosaurus There: 'Wholly Fabulous Report,'" *Beira News*, December 23, 1919, 3.
- 50 Quoted in "Missionary's Leg Pulled," *Rhodesia Herald*, December 23, 1919, 5.
- 51 "The Brontosaurus Myth," *Dar-es-Salaam [Tanzania] Times*, March 19, 1921, 6.
- 52 Wentworth D. Gray, "The Brontosaurus" [letter to the editor], *Times*, February 23, 1920, 10.
- 53 "Game Hunter's Encounter," *Rhodesia Herald*, December 23, 1919, 23.
- 54 I mention Lester Stevens and his dog partly because Heuvelmans chose to feature his hunt for the "giant reptile" as the chapter opener on the topic in his book, and partly because the expedition was both widely reported and silly. Heuvelmans gave his name as "Captain Leicester Stevens," not "Lester Stevens" (*On the Track of Unknown Animals*, 434). See also "Experts Who Believe in It," *Bulawayo Chronicle*, December 26, 1919, 5.
- 55 Ley, *Willy Ley's Exotic Zoology*, 62–74; Ivan T. Sanderson, "There Could Be Dinosaurs," *Saturday Evening Post*, January 3, 1948, 17, 53, 56; Heuvelmans, *On the Track of Unknown Animals*, 434–484.
- 56 Powell, "On the Trail of the Mokele-Mbembe."
- 57 Mackal, *Living Dinosaur*.
- 58 Hans Schomburgk, quoted in Ley, *Willy Ley's Exotic Zoology*, 69. Schomburgk was in a position to make an informed complaint about the difficulty of ethnozoological investigation, having been the first Westerner to confirm the existence and describe for science the pygmy hippopotamus.
- 59 Powell does pose a question: "Was Michel sincere, or had his African creativity been fired by the publicity he had received in Heuvelmans' book? I shall probably never know" ("On the Trail of the Mokele-Mbembe, 87–88). However, he seems to have been

- very impressed with his informant's sincerity, and gives no account of close questioning about the complete reversal of the man's story.
- 60 "The Last Dinosaur" [season 3, episode 52], *MonsterQuest*, History Channel, June 24, 2009, "MonsterQuest: The Last Dinosaur, Pt. 2," YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jfYqA4noqow> (accessed May 4, 2012).
 - 61 Gibbons, *Mokele-Mbembe*, 73, 83.
 - 62 Tokuhara Takabayashi, "The First Japanese-Congolese Mokele-Mbembe Expeditions," *Cryptozoology: Interdisciplinary Journal of the International Society of Cryptozoology* 7 (1988): 67.
 - 63 Gibbons, *Mokele-Mbembe*, 94.
 - 64 For example, Congolese biologist Marcellin Agnagna led several tours to Boha village in the Congo, and Pierre Sima led several tours to Langoue village in Cameroon. Whatever the significance, both Agnagna and Sima claimed personal Mokele Mbembe sightings. See Gibbons, *Mokele-Mbembe*, 57–58, 170–171.
 - 65 Mackal, *Living Dinosaur?* 59.
 - 66 Mackal gives the name as "Antoine Meombe" in *Living Dinosaur?* 61; Powell gives it as "Miobe Antoine" in "On the Trail of the Mokele-Mbembe," 84–91.
 - 67 Mackal, *Living Dinosaur?* 73.
 - 68 Ibid., 74.
 - 69 Powell, "On the Trail of the Mokele-Mbembe."
 - 70 Ibid.
 - 71 Ibid.
 - 72 Mackal, *Living Dinosaur?* 160.
 - 73 Ibid., 103.
 - 74 Gibbons, *Mokele-Mbembe*, 74.
 - 75 Redmond O'Hanlon, *No Mercy: A Journey into the Heart of the Congo* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 375.
 - 76 John H. Acorn, "Good-Humored Adventure in the Congo," *Skeptical Inquirer* 19, no. 3 (1995): 46–48.
 - 77 William Gibbons, "Was a Mokele-Mbembe Killed at Lake Tele?" The Anomalist Archive: High Strangeness Reports, <http://www.anomalist.com/reports/mokele.html> (accessed May 2, 2012).
 - 78 Gibbons, *Mokele-Mbembe*, 109.
 - 79 Mackal, *Living Dinosaur?* 93–95.
 - 80 Quoted in Dembart Lee, "Proof of Dinosaur Sighting May Hinge on What Develops," *Los Angeles Times*, December 23, 1981, A16.
 - 81 "Developed Film Fails to Show Any Dinosaur," *Los Angeles Times*, December 23, 1981, A3.
 - 82 Gibbons, *Mokele-Mbembe*, 81.
 - 83 Gibbons writes that Agnagna threatened "to have us arrested as spies," and implies that Agnagna may have stolen the expedition's undeveloped film (ibid., 81, 83).
 - 84 Takabayashi, "First Japanese-Congolese Mokele-Mbembe Expeditions," 66–69. (This article also describes a previous visit by Takabayashi and two colleagues to speak with

- missionary Eugene Thomas in 1986, and another Japanese expedition in 1987 that included Agnagna.)
- 85 O'Hanlon, *No Mercy*.
 - 86 Nigel Burton, "Real Life Dinosaur Hunt," *Northern Echo* (Darlington, England), June 5, 1999, 7.
 - 87 John Kirk, *In the Domain of the Lake Monsters* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1998), 258.
 - 88 Gibbons, *Mokele-Mbembe*, 86.
 - 89 *Ibid.*, 85–100.
 - 90 *Ibid.*, 96.
 - 91 "Megatranssect Across Africa," *National Geographic*, http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/data/2001/08/01/sights_n_sounds/media.5.2.html (accessed May 5, 2012).
 - 92 Gibbons, *Mokele-Mbembe*, 112–125.
 - 93 The search benefited from \$15,000 from the British Broadcasting Corporation, and \$50,000 from Canadian wealth manager and Young Earth creationist Paul Rockel. See *ibid.*, 127–128. For a statement by Rockel on evolution, see "Where Are the Facts?" [letter to the editor], *Waterloo Region Record* (Ontario, Canada), January 10, 2011, <http://www.therecord.com/opinion/letters/article/318832--where-are-the-facts> (accessed May 2, 2012).
 - 94 Gibbons, *Mokele-Mbembe*, 139.
 - 95 *Ibid.*, 146.
 - 96 On an episode of the podcast from Divine Intervention Radio, Milt Marcy is introduced as a creationist with an active involvement in the notorious Paluxy River "man tracks" (a mixed set of misidentified dinosaur footprints, inorganic indentations, and outright fakes that are found alongside dinosaur trackways, interpreted by a subset of "creation scientists" as proof that human beings lived at the same time as non-avian dinosaurs). See "Living Dinosaurs? Cryptozoologists and Dinosaur Hunters, Dr. William Gibbons and Milt Marcy," Divine Intervention, podcast, March 28, 2008, http://divineintervention.typepad.com/divine_intervention/2008/03/episode-6-livin.html. (accessed May 5, 2012). The story of Marcy's offer to fund Gibbons is in Gibbons, *Mokele-Mbembe*, 151–152.
 - 97 Gibbons, *Mokele-Mbembe*, 158–159.
 - 98 *Ibid.*, 165.
 - 99 *Ibid.*, 168–171.
 - 100 Peter Beach is described as "a Biblical creationist" who promotes the idea that not only sauropods but also pterosaurs have survived to this day. See Nathaniel Coleman, "A Brave Biologist: Living Dinosaurs and Pterosaurs," <http://www.livepterosaur.com/brave-biologist/> (accessed May 4, 2012). As a creationist speaker, Brian Sass bills himself as "B.S.C. Paleobiology. Creation Generation & Genesis Park Research Teams." See "Dinosaur Hunter to Speak in Pangman [Saskatchewan] This Sunday," <http://www.pangman.ca/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/Brian-Sass-News-Re-lease.pdf> (accessed May 4, 2012).
 - 101 Gibbons, *Mokele-Mbembe*, 180–183.
 - 102 "Inside Story: Mullin on Mokele-Mbembe"; Gibbons, *Mokele-Mbembe*, 187–189.

- 103 Neil Mandt and Michael Mandt, "Wild Man & Swamp Dinosaur" [season 2, episode 3], *Destination Truth*, Syfy, March 19, 2008 (Ping Pong Productions).
- 104 "Last Dinosaur, Pt. 2."
- 105 Gibbons, *Mokele-Mbembe*, 197.
- 106 "Inside Story: Mullin on Mokele-Mbembe."
- 107 Gibbons, *Mokele-Mbembe*, 187–188.
- 108 Peter Dodson, Anna K. Behrensmeyer, Robert T. Bakker, and John S. McIntosh, "Taxonomy and Paleocology of the Dinosaur Beds of the Jurassic Morrison Formation," *Paleobiology* 6 (1980): 208–232.
- 109 Bruce H. Tiffney, "Land Plants as Food and Habitat in the Age of Dinosaurs," in *The Complete Dinosaur*, 2nd ed., ed. M. K. Brett-Surman, Thomas R. Holtz Jr., and James O. Farlow (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 569–588.
- 110 Paul C. Sereno, Allison L. Beck, Didier B. Dutheil, Hans C. E. Larsson, Gabrielle H. Lyon, Bourahima Moussa, Rudyard W. Sadler, Christian A. Sidor, David J. Varricchio, Gregory P. Wilson, and Jeffrey A. Wilson, "Cretaceous Sauropods from the Sahara and the Uneven Rate of Skeletal Evolution Among Dinosaurs," *Science* 286 (1999): 1342–1347.
- 111 Donald R. Prothero, *After the Dinosaurs: The Age of Mammals* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006); Lars Werdelin and William Joseph Sanders, eds., *Cenozoic Mammals of Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).
- 112 Mackal, *Living Dinosaur?* 152.
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